

The Public Health Committee Hearing:

Senate Bill 257, An Act Concerning Hepatitis C Screening in Connecticut

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Greetings, and thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing regarding Hep-C screening in the Connecticut. As an African American clergy doing ministry in Stamford, I have witness the tremendous health disparities that affect people of color. In almost every health category African American have a higher cost of care and a poorer prognosis than other groups. And while there are many reasons for the lack of access or care we know that lower the barrier for screening can have a significant impact on families.

We are just beginning to see the tip of the ice-berg for the economic and societal impact of Hepatitis C for our communities and for the state. Bill 257 seeks to require primary care providers to offer Hepatitis C screening to patients born between 1945-65 – aka “Baby Boomers.” As this group ages and enters the Medicare space, 20% will develop cirrhosis, and about 1 in 10 will develop a serious liver disease or liver cancer (Alter et al, 2003; McHutchison & Bacon 2005). Nationally the medical cost of complications from hepatitis C, are expected to increase from \$30 billion to over \$85 billion in 2024.

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection is a growing public health problem in the United States and the worldwide. In the United States HCV is four times more prevalent than HIV/AIDS (NHANES III, 1999-2010; Armstrong et al 2006). Some experts estimate that 50 to 75 percent of those infected are unaware of their infection because they are symptoms free (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004; Armstrong, 2000; Alter, 1997). The landscape for HIV was radically changed by better therapy and better access to testing. I believe we have the opportunity to do the same for what is sometimes called the “silent epidemic”

This Senate Bill 257 is consistent with the guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). You have the opportunity to preemptively address this emerging health threats. You have the opportunity to not only make communities and families healthier and stronger, but also to reduce, if not eliminate the cost of treat HCV complications by providing screening that will be lifesaving.